

5.3.3.2 Existing DFG Management Conditions (New Version Based on Land Use Work Group Discussion of August, 2004)

Historically, recreation in the OWA has been managed primarily by DFG, with assistance from DWR at Thermalito Afterbay. DFG accepted the responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the original part of the OWA pursuant to an agreement with DWR in 1968. In 1986, DFG assumed responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the Thermalito Afterbay part of the OWA. OWA is managed "for the preservation and enhancement of the fish and wildlife resources...and for reasonable use and enjoyment by the public" (DFG 1978). Because of its proximity to Oroville, Gridley, and Biggs, the OWA receives heavy recreational use by local residents. Hunting and wildlife viewing in the OWA attracts visitors from farther away, and the fishing access afforded to 9½ miles of the Feather River also attracts many people from throughout the West. Recreation in the OWA primarily consists of river fishing, pond fishing, boating, camping, sightseeing and wildlife viewing, hunting, mountain biking, and picnicking, with lesser numbers of visitors swimming, target shooting, or training dogs. Group use at the OWA is relatively high. The area hosts special events on occasion, including nature study and educational groups, shooting matches, hunter safety classes, and equestrian events.

DFG manages the OWA as a State Wildlife Area, meaning that fish and wildlife protection and enhancement are the primary management purposes and that recreation and public use are secondary. Because fish and wildlife are primary issues, and because much of the recreational opportunities in the OWA center on fish and wildlife resources, recreation management in the OWA includes fish and wildlife management, habitat improvement, and enforcement of the Fish and Game Code and wildlife area restrictions and regulations. However, the continuous hunting allowed seven days a week during hunting season has resulted in diminished game levels during this season (pers. comm., Atkinson 2003).

[The following would be added to this section]

For the past several years, management conditions at the OWA have been strongly influenced by DFG regional management staff decisions, statewide funding, and personnel shortages. A lack of management personnel and funding is one of the biggest challenges facing the mission of DFG in the OWA. DFG has suggested operating standards of approximately one habitat staff person per 1,000 acres. Based on the DFG suggested standards, prior to statewide funding shortages, the OWA would have been expected to have 12 habitat staff, not including wildlife protection/law enforcement or administrative staff. Prior to March 2004, the 12,000-acre OWA was managed by three habitat staff persons with part-time office staff support and periodically patrolling law enforcement officers.

As a result of staffing shortages and due to the size of the OWA, over the last several years remote areas within the OWA that are accessible by road have been susceptible to illegal activities, such as dumping, fires, and other lawless behavior. DFG staff attempted to remove trash and illegally dumped materials from the OWA when possible, although those activities took time away from management objectives. Maintenance needs such as basic road maintenance and posting directional signage and maps for users have been sporadic due to DFG personnel and budget constraints (pers. comm., Atkinson, 2003). The DFG has expressed concerns over the absence of law enforcement patrolling the OWA due to budget constraints. This condition has placed OWA management operations in a more difficulties management mode for the past several years, where emergency situations are prioritized over operational goals associated with wildlife conservation and recreation in the OWA.

Due to further state-wide funding reductions to the DFG, on March 1, 2004, the three DFG staff persons assigned to the OWA were temporarily assigned to other State wildlife areas with reduced or limited involvement with the OWA. During this interim period, the OWA periodically receives visits from at least one habitat manager for management purposes. DWR's Oroville Field Division has taken over trash removal, restroom maintenance and some general security in the OWA. In addition, the CHP has increased law enforcement activities in the OWA. As of the date this errata sheet or addendum was written (September, 2004), some members of LUWG have noted that general conditions at the OWA have deteriorated over the spring and summer of 2004 due to the staffing reductions. Some LUWG members report increases in general camping violations, illegal activities, and debris and trash accumulations at the OWA. As of this date, it is not known when, or if, the three DFG staff persons will be permanently reassigned to the OWA. It is also not known how the types of management issues that have been mentioned in this section will be consistently addressed, or what management entity will permanently address them if funding to the DFG is not restored.